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ABSTRACT

Literary instruction as a central element of language instruction for non-language majors at the secondary and college level is advocated to remotivate American students to learn languages. This approach is not directed at those who need oral skills, such as prospective language teachers, interpreters, and translators. It is suggested that more could be accomplished by teaching less: students would be taught just to read in the foreign language, using interesting and significant texts. Nonfiction texts and literary texts, including poetry, short stories, novels, and opera libretti, could impart an immediate historical and cultural knowledge and could provide the teacher opportunities to introduce information that would increase the understanding of the text and of its significance. A sensitivity to foreign culture is helpful not only for reading but has its own value and becomes a motivating factor in the language learning process. This concept of literature is broad enough to include an area of individual interest for every student and may result in a habit of reading that will continue beyond school years. The author's personal experiences as a student and the German language are used as examples. (SW)

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Certainly, no one in this setting would deny the importance of learning foreign languages for the following groups: persons

- who work in a foreign country, such as newspaper correspondents or diplomats;
- who deal with foreign language texts in their domestic professions such as librarians;
- who pursue a science or an art, for which foreign texts are important, for instance, German texts in Chemistry, Theology, or Music;
- who deal with foreign customers in their business as it is with many employees of auto firms, hotels and multinational companies;
- who in their own country regularly have contact with foreign speaking minorities, for instance, government employees in California, Texas, or New York;
- who should have an understanding of foreign cultures, like politicians or public relation persons;
- who like to travel abroad as do most Americans when they can afford it.

For all these people, knowledge of a foreign language would be sensible. I presume that many of them are aware of this - probably millions in this country alone. But since many foreigners and almost all visitors who come to this country speak some English, and since interpreters and translators exist for emergency use, only for a minority of these millions is this awareness a sufficient motivation to actually learn a language and use it in such a way that the involvement with the language is more than a youthful phase. From this a specific problem for foreign language studies in America arises. It seems harder to induce Americans to learn a foreign language voluntarily and fluently than to get, for instance, continental Europeans to learn English.

Since the extrinsic motivation in America is clearly less, the intrinsic motivation must be increased if American Foreign Language Departments want to attract many students and acquaint them in depth with a foreign language. Which is to say we must either adapt to needs of the students or awaken needs

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in them which are strong enough to get the students through the difficulties of foreign language instruction. The first two years are the most difficult, and many students do not go beyond that point.

It seems to me that literature-oriented instruction is a means worth trying out to remotivate students, even those students who started studying a foreign language without literary reasons. This should be done in such a way that the students would continue the learning process on their own, after graduation. In order to justify this I have to combine the "Why" of literary instruction with the "How" of language instruction which means that I thus partly intrude on the theme of the first panel. For this I must ask you to make allowances as well as for any deficiencies in my spoken English, a subject to which I will later return.

I do not intend to imply that we should undertake literary instruction with those students who want the language only for traveling. An intensive course for tourists in a continuing education center serves its purposes best. Basic cultural information about the foreign country can easily be given to them in their native language.

The matter is different in the case of students who seek out contact with the foreign language for its own sake, and also for those students who want to use the language not only for a short time but for years and decades. It goes without saying here that language instructors, interpreters and translators need knowledge also of the literary language which forms a central and significant part of the language as a whole. I am advocating more: namely literary instruction as a central element of language instruction for those who in high school or college study a language several semesters or years without themselves intending to become language teachers, interpreters or translators. The fact is obvious, regrettably, that (apart from Spanish) the majority of foreign language students in America have little opportunity to speak the language. Allow me to take German as an example although other languages could be used as well.

Here and there throughout this country we still have communities in which German has been spoken for generations — but not only German. You don't have to know German to communicate with members of these communities, in fact they usually speak even better English than German. Also, there are still immigrants from Germany. But outside of the few German communities they adjust as well as they can and as early as in the first generation to their English speaking environment. Nowadays one may encounter students, tourists or business people from Germany all over America. But as a rule they speak enough English so that Americans can interact with them with no knowledge of German. If one leaves out language majors (becoming teachers or interpreters), a majority of the remaining students of German have contacts with spoken German only in school or college or perhaps in the Army, and maybe on short trips. Experience teaches, sadly, that most people gradually lose foreign language abilities if they have acquired them imperfectly and do not use them regularly. The results are the former students who in spite of two years of college instruction in German one day have only a few idioms at their disposal (Wie geht's? Wie steht's?) and perhaps observe some folkloristic rituals (such as Wurstfest and Oktoberfest). I do not wish to belittle such remnants but they are not quite sufficient to justify two years' study of German and will scarcely suffice to cause former students to convince their younger siblings or friends or later their children to study German voluntarily. As we all know we are dealing more and more with voluntary students in high schools and colleges. In spite of this, I believe a pessimistic conclusion about the future of German instruction in America is unnecessary.

Please, allow me, to speak for a moment about myself. In the German Gymnasium that I attended during the war, I learned much less English than a present day student in an American college would learn German. The English teachers in my school were drafted, their replacement could speak almost no English; when the bombing began, many students my

age (about 15) were employed as Air Force aides (Luftwaffenhelfer). My entire class was sent to an anti-aircraft unit, and from then on had very little school instruction in any subject. Since after the war I studied Germanics, and not English, at the University, there was no longer any need for me to speak English. One could have found opportunities, of course, to speak English, but I did not seek them out. I was afraid that they would frustrate me, without compensating benefits. Adults who speak and understand a foreign language badly, put themselves in the situation of children - without being children - who grasp for words, and can hardly make themselves understood. If they want to use the language with native speakers, they may find themselves shut out by a more rapid speaking or a more difficult vocabulary or unusual speech variations at any time. Misunderstandings, faux pas', inappropriate responses are unavoidable and can plunge the language learner into anxiety and uncertainty which block further learning. Corresponding situations occur not only in the intercourse with native speakers but also in language instruction in the classroom confrontation with the teacher who expects oral answers in the foreign language.

Naturally there are pleasurable moments in the language learning process as in all learning processes. But probably in no other area of knowledge is the awareness of infantilization so clearly felt as it is for the adult language learner.

For that reason the adult learner needs, to a special degree, group solidarity, the psychological help of the teacher, of fellow students and conversational partners. Thus the awakening and increase of motivation is perhaps more important in foreign language studies than in any other area.

The language instruction which I experienced myself consisted of vocabulary questions, pattern drill, exposure to sentences and short texts which had been pasted together according to the needs of the particular lesson. I found them neither exciting nor inspiring, neither informative nor beautiful, neither profound nor provocative. They would have stimulated no child and no adult to look at them twice, to study

them for their own sake, much less to memorize them for their inherent value; they certainly did not motivate me to study English or to seek out conversation with Britons or Americans. I thus had forgotten my little bit of spoken English very quickly.

Fortunately, however, I had as a student good reasons to read English texts. I had political reasons: for the reading of newspapers; financial reasons: for the purchase of cheap paperbacks which came to Germany in quantity, especially from America; intellectual and literary reasons: since the Third Reich had withheld many texts from Germans which were available in English; scholarly reasons: since the reading of Anglo-American journals in my field proved valuable, and since many questions in Germanics could not be answered without a comparative approach. I used the dictionary as seldom as possible, and in time I used it less and less. Certainly I did not always know how the words were pronounced which I read, but that hardly detracted from what I gained by the reading of English prose. Thus it was, that I had read innumerable books in English, before I came to England or America for the first time and had to have my first English conversation with a native speaker. I knew the Peanuts and the Hobbits, Lord Peter Wimsey and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, love novels by George Eliot and Henry Miller, war novels by William Faulkner and Norman Mailer, essays by Christopher Caudwell and J. Robert Oppenheimer, polemic lectures by C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis. I did not need to seek out people to speak English with, just in order to have a conversation. I did not need to finish a book which turned out to be unrewarding, but from every book that I read completely, I was motivated to further reading. The more I read, the easier reading became, and the more I gained from reading. Lingual, aesthetic, and intellectual learning processes proceeded hand in hand, and in time demonstrated their practical value.

Let me apply these personal experiences to the situation of American students. I repeat that I am not thinking of language majors who want to become language instructors or interpreters, and who thus

have to learn to speak, and I am also not thinking of participants in brief courses for tourists, or of those who need a specialized course for their own occupation. I am thinking of high school or college students who take German for several semesters or years without aiming for a college degree in German, and without striving for a job in which spoken German is actually needed. With regard to this group it seems to me questionable to school them primarily in understanding and speaking even though we know that they cannot master these skills in the available time, and that their unsatisfactory oral skills will soon be lost for want of continual use in daily professional or private life. It seems to me worth trying to see whether we, especially in America, would not offer better perspectives to students and accomplish more if we taught them less, namely just to read in the foreign language, even if the discussion of that which is read would be in English. In order to be successful this approach demands that the texts used be interesting and significant.

Literary texts impart an immediate historical and cultural knowledge, and they give the teacher a thousand opportunities to introduce cultural and historical information which increases the understanding of the text and of its historical or contemporary significance but which with time can also create a sensitivity to the foreign culture which is helpful not only for reading but has its own value and in turn becomes a motivating factor in the language learning process.

Literary texts, that means here more than poetry and fiction - novels, short stories, opera libretti, etc. The term should also include non-fictional genres and works which go beyond the boundaries of any special field or occupation and which reach and influence the general public.

The student can discover that there are untranslated texts: from the business section of leading newspapers to Bavarian recipes, from sermons to political manifestos, from encyclopaedia articles to contemporary radio plays - texts, which are worth knowing and the exclusive knowledge of which gives

the students satisfaction and perhaps also advantages in an English speaking environment. After some time the students will even succeed in discovering that translations at times are so inferior to the original, that they are no longer satisfied just to read a translation. For example, Thomas Mann and along with him many others between Martin Luther and Martin Heidegger, even Karl Marx or Friedrich Nietzsche will suddenly mean something different to them than in the American translation. The students will finally be able to observe that for many centuries so much has been translated into German that texts are accessible to them in German which are not yet available in English.

The concept of literature which we defined above (including all works and genres of fiction and non-fiction outside of narrowly specialized fields) is broad enough to include an area of individual interest for every student which so corresponds to the student's inclinations and abilities that the student will develop in that area possibly a habit of reading which will continue beyond school and college. I consider this to be the main learning goal of this suggested method of literary instruction. German newspapers, magazines and books can be procured everywhere, certainly more easily than German conversationalists. Texts are easier to fit into the rhythm of one's life than people. The selection is larger and allows the satisfaction of one's most intimate taste and also allows a constant renewal of input without the all too human conflicts and complications.

I can, however, imagine that in time in the case of some of these students, whether in school or much later, an inner tendency may arise which causes the habitual reader to search for contact also with the spoken language. This desire may express itself as an interest in German movies, or in records containing narratives, plays, lieder and songs, which becomes a stimulus to expose oneself more and more to listening and understanding. From here the step to speaking, given the appropriate opportunity, is not very large and proceeds perhaps from a firmer foundation than if it originated from a form of oral instruction

without literature and thus without continuing practice since college. I can also imagine that some foreign language students who have acquired the habit of reading original texts, even after finishing the language course, occasionally take part in the work of a foreign language department or a comparative literature department, participate, for instance, as auditors in lecture courses, in which foreign language texts are read in the original, but discussed in the native language.

It goes without saying that the method of literary instruction advised here offers its own didactic and organizational problems. I will limit myself to mentioning the identity crisis which a sensitive student can get into when she or he develops into an addicted reader of a foreign literature. The foreign language instructor should carefully consider the students' knowledge of American literature and culture. A comparative approach should combine a growing awareness of one's own tradition and the acquisition of the foreign one. But the foreign language reader will, of course, always encounter certain limits, as I experienced myself, limits with which one must come to terms. For example, one may have a difficulty when one must defend a thesis such as the one presented here before native speakers in oral discussion, a situation such as I am now facing.

Even though I have limited myself to just one group of students, I nevertheless plead guilty to a certain revaluation of values, at least in the education of that kind of students. I plead for the priority of literature and of the literarily oriented instructor above the language laboratory and the audiolingual method. And I also plead for a liaison between foreign language instruction and "literature" instruction which is as intimate as the existing liaison between foreign language instruction and modern linguistics. Three's company.

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